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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: UNASUR ENDORSES EVO'S VERSION OF PANDO "MASSACRE"

REF: A. LA PAZ 2483
[1](#)B. LA PAZ 2374

Classified By: A/DCM Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Bolivian President Evo Morales and Unasur representative Rodolfo Mattarollo held a joint-conference to present Unasur's Pando Commission Report December 3. The report endorses the government's version of a "massacre" of government-aligned peasant farmers in the Pando Department town of Porvenir September 11. Morales went beyond the scope of the report to imply it supported his broader political agenda, something a Unasur commission member told us Peru, Colombia, and Uruguay expressly attempted to avoid. Our commission source also told us the decision to endorse the report was made country-by-country for "narrow political interests" to engender the Bolivian government at the expense of a fair or credible report. The commission member and contacts in the Bolivian Congress and the diplomatic community unanimously described the report as a decidedly pro-government and incomplete account of September 11 events that will be used by the government to justify a "purge" of Pando's opposition leaders. Meanwhile, the Bolivian Human Rights Ombudsman's Pando report has been used by both political sides, indicating a combination of balance, vagueness, and toothlessness. End Summary.

Evo Endorses Unasur Report

[1](#)2. (U) In a joint-government/Unasur presentation December 3, Bolivian President Evo Morales endorsed the Union of South American Nations' report on the events of September 11 in Pando Department (state). Morales said the report confirmed the government's characterization of the violence between pro- and anti-government supporters in the city of Porvenir as a "massacre, not a standoff." Morales contended the report would help Bolivia in its "historic fight" against injustice, racism, and humiliation of the country's indigenous population by oligarchs intent on "crushing the people."

[1](#)3. (U) Morales linked the conflict to a "failed civil coup" against the federal government conducted by leaders of

opposition-controlled departments during late August/early September. Morales criticized the opposition for resorting to violence and obstruction, tactics Morales claimed the opposition did not engage in when he was part of it, and also took a barb at the United States for being "the only" country that had not "supported democracy" during the August/September unrest. Although Morales did not otherwise address the United States, he said it was encouraging that "South American countries could solve their own problems," a nod to on-going Morales complaints about undue U.S. influence in the OAS and UN. Morales invited Unasur to take an active part in the "next stage" of ongoing investigations of Pando suspects.

Unasur Report Endorses Evo

¶4. (U) Unasur Pando Commission leader Rodolfo Mattarollo provided a summary of the 66-page report's findings, including criticism of security forces for a slow and clumsy response to the incident and placing blame for the violence and "cruel torture" with "a chain of command and support of officials and resources from the departmental government." Mattarollo characterized the "massacre" as inspired by racism and a "flagrant and extremely grave violation of the right to life." Among the conclusions, the Unasur report found the conflict was a "massacre" as defined by the United Nations and that those who perpetrated crimes should be "judged by ordinary (Bolivian) justice." Although Mattarollo mentioned the initial violence against prefecture staff by campesinos (peasant farmers) early in the morning of September 11, resulting in a death and several injuries, he treated it as a separate incident near the end of his presentation that "should be investigated."

Opposition: Whitewash Report Hangs Us Out to Dry

¶5. (C) Opposition Senators Oscar Ortiz (Santa Cruz) and Roger Pinto (Santa Cruz) told PolOff the morning of the presentation that they predicted a Unasur report that follows strictly the government narrative (please protect all contacts). They said the commission's nearly three-hour interview with opposition congressmen consisted of leading questions at the behest of the lead Venezuelan representative, such as "who else was involved in the massacre?" Ortiz said he thought Unasur's discussions with opposition-aligned Pandinos was "simply so they could say they talked to us" to add legitimacy to the report. "We wanted to explain our side of the story, but they had already made up their minds," said Pinto. Ortiz said he expected that the report that the Bolivian Congress will eventually release on the conflict will be even closer to the government's version of events, if not identical.

¶6. (C) Lower House Representative Marisol Aban (MNR, Beni) told PolOff November 3 that she resigned her position on the congressional commission investigating Pando because "it was obvious that the conclusion would be whatever Evo wants it to be." The only remaining "opposition" member from the National Union party on the commission is widely considered to be sympathetic to the government and on its payroll, according to Aban and fellow UN party representative Elsa Guevara (Chuquisaca). Aban claimed Unasur countries that might have provided more balance (like Colombia) at best confined themselves to attending meetings in La Paz and deliberately left the "investigation" role to Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Venezuela, which she referred to as "allies of (Venezuelan President) Hugo Chavez." Guevara added that the choice of Mattarollo to head Unasur's Pando Commission is "a bad joke," as he has close links with Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and is an advisor to Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA.

Unasur, Fernandez, and Police Response

¶7. (C) Pinto said ex-Pando Prefect Leopoldo Fernandez told

him he cut his Unasur interview short after it started with a series of leading questions along the lines of "why he killed all those people, how he did it, and where are the missing bodies." Pinto said Unasur also implied to Fernandez that he was "somehow to blame for the police and military not showing up, which is ridiculous; they report to the (federal) government." Pinto said he tried to mobilize the police in Pando's capital Cobija to move forces to Porvenir the morning of September 11, but that the commander on duty said he was under orders not to deploy. The commander allegedly told Pinto he would only consider sending police on Pinto's authority if he provided a written request. Although Pinto said he scribbled an order out to the commander, "they never came."

Will Missing Victims Claims Mean Opposition Open Season?

18. (C) Pinto said he hoped the Unasur report would not be allowed to become the "authoritative" history of the Porvenir conflict, adding he and others were lobbying other international institutions to do a separate report. Pinto was concerned the Unasur report would allege missing dead, including female and child victims, which would allow the government a pretext to conduct an open-ended investigation aimed at purging Pando's opposition leadership, even those, like himself, who were not in Porvenir when violence erupted.

The report indeed alleges missing victims and estimates the Porvenir death toll at "for the moment, 20 assassinated campesinos," a figure at odds with the official count of 13, which supposedly also includes opposition dead (reftel a). (Note: Both opposition and government media have provided estimates ranging from 13 to 18 dead, but without details/names. The Bolivian Human Rights Ombudsman's Pando report names 19 dead, but that includes one opposition death and two deaths from the takeover of the Cobija airport September 12, leaving 16 campesino deaths. End Note.) Pinto alleged and a ruling party MAS Deputy Ana Lucia Reis (strictly protect) confirmed, that Presidency Minister Juan Ramon Quintana is building a case against him, alleging missing bodies of campesinos are buried on his property. Pinto said there has been "not one" missing persons report filed in conjunction with the September 11 violence.

19. (C) Guevara said the Unasur report "gives the green light" to a witchhunt for opposition leadership in Pando, but contended this was "already decided" September 15, when Unasur "sentenced the opposition to death" by voting to "support Evo Morales unconditionally." She said Chilean President Michelle Bachelet's comparisons of the Bolivian opposition to Pinochet are naive, "childlike," and ultimately dangerous. Ortiz later said publicly the report is a "blank check for the government to develop any act of violence."

No They Can't; Unasur/GOB Claims You Can't Believe In

110. (C) Aban claimed the chairman of the Pando congressional committee confirmed to her December 1 that there had been no missing persons reports filed regarding the missing campesinos. "Why is no one crying for these missing people," she argued. "Because they do not exist." Guevara said the government should have lost all credibility after it originally claimed there were 30 dead, released a video claiming campesinos were fired upon while swimming across a nearby river, and asserted that the United States was involved. "All these things have been proven false and the government has never addressed this. How can anyone take them seriously?"

111. (C) Opposition Deputy Felipe Flores (Podemos, Potosi) added that the stark difference between the government's original statements and its current Pando position, exaggerated as it is, is undermining government supporters' confidence in his district. "This is something people can understand and question, unlike much of the political and economic issues that are too complicated."

¶12. (C) All contacts agreed that the report is most revealing for what it leaves out: a coherent explanation of why the campesino march was organized, who organized it, why there were so many "local" protesters from Beni and La Paz departments, if the campesinos were armed (the report only states it was impossible to determine), and what impact the murder of two prefecture employees had on the subsequent encounter in Porvenir. "If this was a serious investigation, they would have (alleged march organizer) Miguel "Chiquitin" Becerra in custody with Leopoldo (Fernandez)," argued Guevara. Fernandez also recently made this point, adding that Quintana should join him in San Pedro prison, and a group of opposition prefects and civic committees (CONALDE) announced December 3 it would present legal action against Quintana for sedition against Fernandez's government and "generating a state of violence and panic in order to implement a political agenda of terror to unseat the elected authority."

¶13. (C) Pinto admitted the people of Porvenir "overreacted," but contended that their panic was "real and no one did anything to counter it. All they knew is that a mob of campesinos had killed some of their friends and was headed for their town." Pinto suggested that the government should concentrate on "forgiveness" and "healing the wounds" of Pando, instead of "throwing stones when they are clearly not without sin."

All Spin Zone: Unasur Loves All Things Evo, Or Does It?

¶14. (C) A Peruvian member of the Unasur Commission (strictly protect) told us Peru and Colombia rejected a Venezuelan/Argentine report version that included sycophantic references to Bolivia's "process of change" and its draft constitution. He shared both the original and final report conclusions with PolOff. The original would have endorsed the Morales administration broadly and linked the report's findings directly to the government's political agenda. He added that the deleted sections may yet surface via Internet as a Venezuelan "comment," likely December 5.

¶15. (C) Despite the removal of the text, Morales orally added just such an explicit endorsement of his government during his November 3 presentation comments. Morales implied the report supported the government's efforts to conduct a "profound revolution" in the corrupt and politicized Bolivian justice system and to redistribute land, because a "fight for land" sparked the September 11 violence.

Inside Unasur: Not as Unanimous as Advertised

¶16. (C) Despite Mattarollo's contention that the report "was written with unanimity by all the commissioners," a Peruvian member of the commission told us there was a great deal of contention behind the scenes among missions, capitals, and "very left leaning" members sent from host countries to participate in the commission. He confirmed the split in the commission described by Aban, adding that Peru, Colombia, and Uruguay had fought a "difficult and thankless" battle against the worst excesses of Venezuelan, Argentine, Chilean, and Brazilian commission members. He claimed other countries did not take an active part in either the investigation itself or wrangling over the final text.

¶17. (C) The Paraguayan Charge told EmbOff that President Lugo decided against sending a Unasur representative to the Bolivian investigation. Instead, the Charge represented Paraguay at the Unasur with strict instructions "not to take an active role" in the Pando case. According to the Peruvian commission member, the Uruguayan Ambassador pulled Uruguayan participation in early November, refused to sign the final report, forcing the Uruguayan Political Section Chief in the Uruguayan Embassy in Buenos Aires to sign it, and did not

attend the presentation.

Peru/Colombia/Uruguay Win Some, Lose Some

¶18. (C) The Peruvian delegate said Colombia and Peru fought to restrict the death toll to 13, the Bolivian government's official count. However, the Brazilian representative was convinced there were more and pressed for 20 and vague language about an "unknown number of deaths." He contended the Brazilian "kept mumbling to himself constantly 'there must be more, there must be more.'" The Peruvian delegate explained that some members were swayed by testimony of Interim Prefect Rafael Bandeira, who argued that families are not filing missing persons reports because they are afraid of retaliation. He added that many member countries were "misapplying their own national histories" with missing persons and political prosecution to the investigation instead of looking at the Pando case objectively. "They are ignoring the reality of this country."

¶19. (C) The Peruvian delegate claimed Peru also fought against the conclusion that Fernandez should be tried by "ordinary justice," essentially weighing in on an internal Bolivian legal matter, stripping Fernandez of his prefectural immunities, and supporting the government's position against the Bolivian Supreme Court's order that Fernandez should be tried in Sucre under their jurisdiction. He said Peru tried to balance this with a vague observation in support of political dialogue and respect for the rule of law. The Peruvian delegate also said Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay insisted that the deaths of two prefecture employees in the early morning of September 11 be included as "essential context," to the objection of Venezuela and Argentina. "The Argentines wanted to say (prefect engineer Pedro) Oshiro was killed in a car accident." The delegate asserted Peru demanded an autopsy, after which it was clear campesinos shot Oshiro in the head. The parties reached a compromise to include the earlier incident and deaths, but not to link the event directly to the Porvenir "massacre" and without attributing blame for the deaths.

Opposition Report Fears Confirmed; Chavez in Charge

¶20. (C) The Peruvian representative contended the report "entirely supports the government's position, which was the point all along." He agreed that the opposition's fear that the report would likely be used by the government to justify political arrests was "real" and "likely" (Note: Government news agency ABI headlined "Unasur recommends investigation of killings of children, disappeared" December 4. End Note.) The Peruvian delegate also confirmed that:
--Mattarollo developed his investigation as if the government's position was "a fore-drawn conclusion."
--Mattarollo interrogated rather than interviewed opposition-aligned Pandinos.
--The report "ignores the context" of the situation and the opposition perspective "entirely." He believes the campesinos were marching "to Cobiya to retake government buildings and (violently) force Fernandez from power."
--The commission obtained "credible testimony" that Fernandez asked for military and police reinforcement to diffuse the situation before the massacre occurred, although it is still unclear why forces were not dispatched. However, he added Fernandez "also sent his own people and many of them participated (in the standoff). ... This was a disproportionate response ... the term massacre, while correct, is not the best label."
--The Bolivian government hand-picked and supervised all testimonials, conditions under which many potential witness refused to testify. A representative from Quintana's office was always present and two vice ministers "participated" in the investigation.
--Venezuela helped finance and plan the investigation. "When they said the government and Venezuelans would be employed as handlers for the investigation, I thought that meant providing transportation and accommodations. I had no idea

they meant they would be leading the investigation."

Final Draft: Realpolitik Trumps Truth

¶21. (C) The Peruvian delegate argued that in the end Unasur members were driven by "narrow political interests" that require continued warm relations with the Morales administration. He cited the need of Bolivia's neighbors for access to Bolivian gas and other natural resources, Bachelet's urgency to conclude an agreement on Bolivian sea access, Colombia's desire to limit Unasur's human rights overview powers, and Peru's interest in keeping all mention of Peruvian mercenaries under Fernandez's control out of the report (Note: Government officials had implied Brazilian and Peruvian gunmen were involved in the violence. End Note).

¶22. (C) The Peruvian said in the end Peru and Colombia decided the "details of how many people were killed" and other text disagreements were "not worth" risking a unanimous report. Turning defensive, the Peruvian reiterated the text changes made by Peru and, while acknowledging the report "was not the whole story," defended the report. "This is the best deal we could have made ... Everything in it is true; there was a massacre." The representative concluded that trying to press for more changes could have led to a messy public fight for the nascent Unasur and could have endangered Peruvian relations with Bolivia, and with it Peru's influence regarding its many interests in Bolivia. "It is better to stay engaged."

Unasur Taps Into Evo's TV feed

¶23. (C) At the government/Unasur presentation, Unasur played an edited version of a government video advertisement currently being played in heavy rotation on the government television channel. The video shows segments of the September 11 confrontations and identifies suspects linked with Pando opposition-controlled civic committees and prefectural government throughout. One of those singled out in the video is Pastor Toni Rivero, who was killed during the military takeover of the Cobija airport September 12. Rivero's sister (who lives in Santa Cruz), told EmbOff she has received phone calls from named military sources threatening her to "keep her mouth shut" and "cause trouble8 regarding the case."

¶24. (C) The Peruvian Unasur commission delegate said Mattarollo showed him extensive videos of the September events, parts of which were used in the government and Unasur videos. Mattarollo admitted privately to the Peruvian delegate that the source was Venezuelan intelligence, after the Peruvian questioned the ability of the Bolivian government to produce such a comprehensive and technically advanced products. The delegate said the commission expressly rejected including the video as an annex to the report, but that Mattarollo included it regardless. (Note: When news of the Pando conflict first broke, the government put out a video which it later had to admit was doctored. End Note.)

Human Rights Ombudsman's Endorsement by Association

¶25. (C) The Unasur report video also includes scenes of government officials meeting with the Bolivian Human Rights Ombudsman Walter Albarracin, implying a tacit endorsement of the government's position. The government previously characterized Albarracin's November 29 report as supporting their version of a Pando "massacre" against "defenseless campesinos." The toothless and vague report appears to be all things to all people, as leading daily La Razon headlined "The Ombudsman Recommends Access to Justice." Although the report does describe the Porvenir violence as "a massacre" and a "crime against humanity," Albarracin does not appear to cast blame, instead advising relevant authorities to "take the measures necessary according to their competencies to

ensure access to right of justice." He also criticized the "indefinite" incarceration of Fernandez and urged a "case by case" approach to suspects, rather than blanket arrests, a subtle criticism of the government's investigation. Albarracin seemed similarly balanced (or wishy washy) in statements concerning the Unasur report. In conversations with PolOff (reftel b), Albarracin said although there are individuals that clearly committed crimes, he couldn't attribute blame for the overall violence to either side in a case "where no one really knows exactly what happened." He also complained the government was interfering with his investigation and called the government's arrests of Pando suspects "illegal" on procedural grounds.

Comment

¶26. (C) We are skeptical that the Unasur report or the comments from the human rights ombudsman are being accurately characterized by the government, which has a record of taking international statements out of context. For the Unasur report to ignore the impact of the initial violence September 11, when a Pando department engineer was shot in the head, or the subsequent panic and call-to-arms of Porvenir residents calls its impartiality into question, to say the least. Also suspect: Unasur's reliance on and regurgitation of government-scripted witnesses and evidence and presentation of their "independent" findings in a public event co-hosted by and with final remarks from President Morales.

¶27. (C) We may have been spared mention in the report because the Venezuelans, Brazilians, and Peruvians did not want to revisit charges that their nationals were involved (and in Venezuela's case, among the dead). In any event, Unasur's first foray into member state investigation is a supreme disappointment, favoring an Evo lovefest fueled by political interests instead of honestly trying to deconstruct a complicated violent conflict. Surprisingly, the domestic product from the Ombudsman, despite its shortcomings, is a much better and less partisan effort to dissect the truth of Pando.

¶28. (C) We do not find it surprising that the government and Venezuelan members of the delegation attempted to take such a prominent role in influencing the investigation, but it is concerning that members from other countries went along. It would be helpful to speak with contacts in Pando, both opposition and government, to test this report's conclusions, which we hope to do now that the state of siege has been lifted. To date, the only government-aligned contact that has weighed in with us privately on the matter (Reis) has endorsed the opposition's account of events. Those who engaged in criminal behavior in Porvenir should be held accountable, of course, but this report appears to ignore the role that prominent government leaders and surrogates, such as Quintana, had in lighting the fuse that lead to this "massacre." End Comment.

LAMBERT